

488th IS recognized for expertise, vigilance and professionalism

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The 488th Intelligence Squadron RAF Mildenhall, England, is a vital part of Team Mildenhall, but at the same time is a world unto itself.

The more than 400 hard-working active duty members of the 488th have a quiet mission, but when they do it, they do it with a bang.

While attending the Air Intelligence Agency Commanders' Conference in San Antonio, Texas, in October, Lt. Col. T.J. Kopf accepted the Chief Master Sgt. James Swindell Award for Excellence in Communications-Computer Systems for 1997.

The award singles out the 488th as the best of 35 similar squadrons in AIA.

Also, for the fifth year running, the unit has been the U.S. Air Force's nominee for the Director's Trophy, an award recognizing outstanding performance by a tactical U.S. cryptologic unit.

Along these same lines, during the recent AIA Sensor Olympics XVIII, an annual enlisted skills competition, the intelligence squadron boasted four award winners.

For the third year in a row, Tech. Sgt. Tim Hodge won the gold for communications-computer systems operations craftsman; Tech. Sgt. John Rumery won the gold for ground radio communications craftsman; Tech. Sgt. Jim Moon won the silver for inventory management craftsman; and Staff Sgt. Carl Keenan won a bronze for electronic system security assessment craftsman.

The intelligence squadron is its own microcosm, with mission support, operations and logistics flights.

However, there is still plenty of interaction between the squadron and the wing and other units at Team Mildenhall.

"Mildenhall is the best place to be an associate unit - the 100th Air Refueling Wing and all the other units here understand they aren't here solely for the 100th.

Equally important to them is their support of each of the associate units," said Kopf. "The entire base and leadership focus on support of the vast array of missions that go on here."

Maj. Michael Black, 488th Logistics Flight commander, strongly echoes that team concept, and applies it to his own flight.

"My folks don't have the high visibility jobs, but they really keep us up and running," said Black of his maintenance and supply technicians.

"I've worked at many units, but the level of knowledge and technical expertise is very high here. These are the highest caliber people I've seen during my entire career," said Black.

His supply specialists alone track and maintain a shop with about \$54 million worth of equipment, he said, and have solid proof of their contributions to the mission: they've won the Best Supply Unit in AIA for two years running.

Enter the maintainers - of the extensive equipment on hand, they work on and fix most of it right here

on station. Some of the bigger fixes are sent back to depot, but the technicians devote themselves to limiting what gets sent off station as much as possible.

To this is added the fact that most maintenance specialists who get assigned to the 488th have never worked on this kind of equipment before, which calls for intensive OJT and fast catch-up work, to keep up with the demanding pace of this fast-moving squadron.

Staff Sgt. Steve Hopper, who's an "old timer" at the intelligence squadron, has been there for more than three years, and reflects on what a change it was from his previous job.

"This equipment is completely different from what I worked on in Air Combat Command," said Hopper. "I used to work on B-52s and F-15s - this is my first AIA experience, and I had to do a lot of OJT. It was quite an adjustment."

That hard work hasn't deterred him, though; in his opinion, Mildenhall is a great place to be.

Most of the more well-known jobs in the 488th fall under the operations flight, as well as about two-thirds of the people assigned to the squadron.

These are the flyers, the back-end crews (the intel folks who sit in the back of the RC-135s and gather information.)

Hard work is nothing new to these people either - training is their middle name. As an example of the intense amount of training an intelli-

gence specialist receives before arriving at their first station, the average time from basic training to arrival on station is 113 weeks for a cryptologic linguist.

A crypto-linguist will start like everyone else with basic training. From there, the next step is the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, Calif., for 60 weeks, and on to Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas, for about 16 weeks more of intelligence training. That is followed by advanced survival training for about six weeks at Fairchild Air Force Base, Wash., and finally they wrap it up with 16 to 20 weeks of training at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., in the "hot trainer."

The hot trainer is a Rivet Joint mission simulator, designed to reduce the amount of time the crypto-linguists spend learning the on-board equipment systems once they arrive at the 488th.

Ninety percent of the 488th's crypto-linguists are airborne, and fly

an average of three missions per week. According to Maj. Kurt Wilkerson, director of operations, the 488th had more than 10,000 deployment days last year, an ops tempo to rival any unit at RAF Mildenhall.

Wilkerson has high praise for the operators he works with, who he says handle the high ops tempo and demanding pace of the squadron exceptionally well.

"These are some of the hardest working people I've ever seen," Wilkerson said. "They know the mission, they know how to get it done, and that's a great thing to see.

"They are true professionals, and I'm proud for this chance to work with them," said Wilkerson.

For all parts of the 488th, because of the classified mission, recognition for that professionalism and hard work can be a challenge.

"It can be difficult to write up the annual or quarterly awards packages and performance reports when so much of the mission is classified,"

said Kopf, "but we work hard in other ways to get them the recognition they deserve.

"We have internal quarterly and even monthly awards and recognition programs for that," Kopf said.

Kopf also stressed that when involved in activities outside the squadron, the people in the 488th shine brightly.

"Whenever we have folks in airman leadership school, academies or any kind of PME, our folks do exceptionally well, whether it be a distinguished graduate award or a Levitow award or some other recognition."

Another sign both Kopf and Wilkerson see as a positive indication of the job satisfaction of the squadron members is the in-place consecutive overseas tour request rate and the extension rate.

"When people feel like what they are doing is really important to the Air Force and having a significant impact, then they want to stay and continue," said Kopf. ■

Editor's note: This is the second article in a three-part series on Internship Programs offered by the National Security Agency/Central Security Service for Air Force intelligence members.

Internship programs await

AIA linguists have unique opportunities to enhance their skills

*by 2nd Lt. Robert Chambers
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If you thought that Air Force linguists received language training only at the Defense Language Institute, then you may not be aware of some unique programs at the National Security Agency/Central Security Service.

This month, we will take a closer

look at some of these special courses available for cryptolinguists.

The Military Language Program was designed with the military linguist in mind.

Although it varies slightly from language to language, its main goal is to further develop the linguistic

skills of career orientated middle-enlisted personnel.

Linguists accepted into this program generally possess an outstanding record of past linguistic performance and a high potential for growth.

In addition, they ideally have an

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2nd Lt. Robert Chambers

initial L2/R2 language proficiency as determined by the Defense Language Proficiency Test. All MLP participants will be assigned to NSA/CSS for at least a three-year tour.

During this time, they will be enrolled in individually structured programs consisting of National Cryptologic School language courses, as well as operational tours throughout NSA/CSS work centers.

MLP participants are also encouraged to pursue language certification through the NSA/CSS Professionalization Program.

Most programs include accelerated training in their specific language, ranging from in-country immersion, assisting instruction for in-house global proficiency classes, as well as mentoring junior linguists.

Participants also have the opportunity to participate in temporary duties for other organizations in order to learn more about the "big picture."

Graduates will be capable of handling almost any linguistically critical event that could arise.

Operational tours introduce them to language materials which range anywhere from formatted technical

information to extremely complex and freeflow global language data.

According to Lynda Wilkerson, language advisory council chairman, participants have all been highly motivated and top-notch.

"Ideally, a participant in this program will attain 3/3 on the DLPT while acquiring basic competence in two or more dialects and learning the basics of several target areas. This is a fairly ambitious goal," Wilkerson said.

Participants have the option to pursue adjunct faculty certification, professionalization or other areas of interest constant with the overall purposes of the MLP to improve global language skills and to broaden the technical and analytical knowledge base of participants.

"We believe these programs are worthwhile, as long as the follow-on assignment is language-intensive.

"Graduates are technical leaders who can function as force multipliers or in a teaching situation.

"If the services do not pay close attention to using these valuable resources, then the program will have to be looked at very closely in terms of payoff investment," said Tom

Bradford, language program executive.

To honor this commitment, AFCEC works closely with both Headquarters Air Intelligence Agency assignments, Kelly Air Force Base, Texas, and the Air Force Personnel Center, Randolph Air Force Base, Texas, to ensure MLP graduates have appropriate follow-on assignments that benefit both the individual and the Air Force.

Linguists interested in the MLP may contact their command language program manager and keep an eye out for future issues of the *Spokesman*.

Notifications on program openings are usually posted in January and July.

Although the Military Cryptanalytic Linguist Training Program offers training for linguists, it's not part of the general MLP.

MCLTP was established for career linguists with the goal of creating operators that are highly skilled in both language and cryptanalysis.

The intent of MCLTP is to develop a cadre of middle-enlisted career linguists who possess both the linguistic and cryptanalytic skills to enable them to serve as technical leaders in the field of cryptolinguistics.

As technical leaders, they will be expected to perform diverse cryptanalytic functions, and assist in developing both the linguistic and cryptanalytic skills of junior linguists.

MCLTP is also designed to assist participants in advancing towards both linguistic and cryptanalytic certification in the NSA/CSS Professionalization Program.

More information contact Master Sgt. Stephen Whitehurst, cryptologic Linguist Program chief, at AFCEC/DOM Ops 2B Ste. 1016, 9800 Savage Rd Ste. 6202, Fort Meade MD 20755-6202; DSN 644-6934 COMM 301-688-6934 NSTS 963-3474. ■